

# Religious Disputations and Imperial Ideology: The Purpose and Location of Akbar's *Ibadatkhana*

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*The concept of religious debate is encountered even in the pre-Mughal period in India: we hear of special assemblies (mahzar) that held religious discussions but were confined to controversial themes within predominantly the Hanafi school of thought. But such debates were the instruments of the orthodoxy to consolidate their sway over the dissenters. The evidence of these religious assemblies (majlis) under the reign of Akbar is as early as 1570.*

*However, from the testimonies of a critique of Akbar (Badauni), a theologian (Shaikh Nurul Haq) and a known sycophant and courtier (Abul Fazl), it appears that the constitution of the Ibadatkhana and the discussions being held therein were not an extension of the type of religious debates that were held or organized before. It is the argument of this essay that the Ibadatkhana was an instrument of 'tolerance' for the imposition of 'Reason'. Throughout his reign there was a stress on reason ('aql), which was to be given precedence over traditionalism (taqlid).*

*This article, on the basis of contemporary sources, further goes on to fix the location of the Ibadatkhana at Fathpur Sikri. The author proposes that the so-called daftarkhana was in fact the place where this important edifice was located.*

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One of the most intriguing structures built during the reign of Akbar is the *Ibadatkhana* at Fathpur Sikri which, in spite of various attempts, has so far escaped firm identification. Its purpose has also not been fully comprehended or explained by modern scholars. It is, however, quite certain that it was the site for discussions and debates on culture and religion.

The concept of religious debate is encountered even in the pre-Mughal period in India. Special assemblies (*mahzar*) holding religious discussions were convened, but they appeared confined to controversial topics within the predominant Hanafi school of thought. Thus, themes, such as the legality of the mystic practice of *sama* were taken up for discussion before being judged.<sup>1</sup> Such debates were the instruments of the orthodoxy to consolidate their sway over dissenters.

There is evidence of religious assemblies (*majlis*) being held during the reign of Akbar, as early as 1570 AD. When Mirza Muflis, an Islamic scholar specializing

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<sup>1</sup> Isami (1948: 117–20).

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in logic (*ilm-i mantiq*) came from Central Asia, Indian scholars such as Makhdum ul Mulk Abdullah Sultanpuri and Shaikh Abdun Nabi posed awkward questions to him and ridiculed him.<sup>2</sup> Was the *Ibadatkhana* an extension of a hegemonistic religious attitude on the part of the orthodoxy?

This question was addressed by a scholar, theologian and critic of Akbar, Abdul Qadir Badauni, who was attached to the emperor's court and wrote about it secretly. He sought to provide an answer to this question in a way that brings out the spiritual phase of Akbar's life once the crucial task of state-building had been largely accomplished:

In the year nine hundred and eighty-three (983) the buildings of the *Ibadatkhana* were completed. The cause was this. For many years previously the Emperor had gained in succession remarkable and decisive victories. The empire had grown in extent from day to day; everything turned out according to his will, and no opponent was left in the whole world. His Majesty had thus leisure to come into nearer contact with ascetics and the disciples of his reverence [the late] Khwaja (Muinuddin Chishti of Ajmer), and passed much of his time in discussing the Word of God and the word of the Prophet. Questions of Sufism, scientific discussions, enquiries into subtleties of Philosophy and Law (*fiqh*), were the order of the day. His Majesty spent whole nights in praising God; he continually occupied himself in pronouncing *Ya huwa*, and *Ya hadi*, in which he was well-versed. His heart was full of reverence for Him, who is the true Giver, and from a feeling of thankfulness for his past successes he would sit many a morning alone in prayer and meditation on a large flat stone of an old building which lay near the palace in a lonely spot, with his head bent over his chest, gathering the bliss of the early hours of dawn. When he heard that Sulaiman Kararani, governor of Bengal, used every night to offer *tahajjud* (night long prayers) in the company of some 150 persons consisting of renowned Shaikhs and Ulama, and used to remain in their society till morning listening to commentaries and exhortations, and then, after offering up the morning prayers, would occupy himself in State-business, and the affairs of the army, and of his subjects and when also news arrived from Badakhshan of the coming of Mirza Sulaiman, who was a prince of Sufi tendencies, and had become a *Sahib-i-hal*, and a Murid ...<sup>3</sup>

The fact that after his conquests and victories, Akbar had the 'leisure' to indulge in intellectual pursuits is also indicated by the official chronicler Abul Fazl:

Although Almighty God raised that man of pure disposition [Akbar] to lofty heights, to increased territory, and gave him a large number of devoted attendants;

<sup>2</sup> Bayat (1941: 307–08).

<sup>3</sup> Badauni (1865: 200–1).

and although he blessed him with gaining possession of the wonders of the world, the opening of the doors of knowledge, and lofty perception, yet that suppliant to the Deity increased his supplications, and the thirst for inquiry augmented.<sup>4</sup>

Abul Fazl gives a second reason for the establishment of the *Ibadatkhana* and the holding of religious discussions therein. According to the official version, the *Ibadatkhana* was established to ‘establish a feast of truth’:

Wisdom and deeds would be tested, and the essence of manhood would be exhibited. Those who were founded on truth entered the hall of acceptance, while those who were only veneered with gold went hastily to the pit of base metal. There was a feast of theology and worship. The vogue of creature-worship was reduced. The dust-stained ones of the pit of contempt became adorners of dominion, and the smooth-tongued, empty-headed rhetoricians lost their rank. To the delightful precincts of that mansion founded upon Truth, thousands upon thousands of inquirers from the seven climes came with heartfelt respect and waited for the advent of the *Shahinshah*. The world’s lord would, with open brow, a cheerful countenance, a capacious heart, and an understanding soul pour the limpid waters of graciousness on those thirsty-lipped ones of expectation’s desert, and act as a refiner. He put them into currency, sect by sect, and tested them, company by company. He got hold of every one of the miserable and dust-stained ones, and made them successful in their desires—to say nothing of the be-cloaked and the be-turbaned. From that general assemblage H.M. selected by his far-reaching eye a chosen band from each class, and established a feast of truth. Then that cambist and coin-tester (*sairafi*) [Akbar] examined them anew and invited some of them ...<sup>5</sup>

Abul Fazl is more explicit in the text of an earlier recension of the *Akbarnama*.

In the same assembly (*ibadatkhana*) the emperor then spoke through his auspicious tongue that ‘I have organized this assembly (*majlis*) for this purpose only that the facts of every religion, whether Hindu or Muslim, be brought out in the open. The closed hearts of our (religious) leaders and scholars be opened so that the Musalmans should come to know who they are! (As) they themselves are unaware (about their religion): They only think of Muslims (i.e. themselves) as those who recite *kalima*, consume meat and perform *sijda* on the earth. (They should know) Muslims are those who wage war on their ‘self’ (*jihad bin nafs*) and control their desires and temper; and surrender (themselves) to the rule of law.<sup>6</sup>

<sup>4</sup> Abul Fazl (1887: 112).

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

<sup>6</sup> Abul Fazl (1887).

Elsewhere in the same recension of the *Akbarnama*, Abul Fazl traces the role of the *Ibadatkhana* discussions to the ultimate transformation of the emperor into the *mujtahid* (interpreter of religious law) of the age. He rationalized that being an emperor, Akbar should have busied himself with the affairs of the state, yet, he took time off to hold a large number of religious assemblies at the *Ibadatkhana* for which the non-orthodox scholars praised him while traditional scholars criticized him. However, through these discussions ‘people of intellect’ came to understand that the emperor was right intentioned and munificent (*nek akhtar*) and ‘thus God has bestowed upon him the power to do *ijtihad* and made him the *mujtahid* of the age’. Consequently, many among the *ulema* through a written deed acknowledged him as such. On ‘the day of *Bahman*, 20 *Shahriwar*, that is 10 *Rajab* 987 [2 September 1579] the *mahzar* was signed, and the emperor himself delivered the *khutba*.<sup>7</sup>

Shaikh Nurul Haq, son of Shaikh Abdul Haq Muhaddis Dehlavi, well-known theologian and mystic of Delhi, apparently supported this version of Abul Fazl. He noted that the emperor used to say:

My sole aim, O wise men and mullas, is to ascertain the truth, to find out and discover the Reality. Take care, therefore, that you are not induced to conceal the truth, or to say anything contrary to the truth due to your human passions. If you do so, you are responsible before God for the consequences of your impiety!<sup>8</sup>

Thus, from different testimonies of a critic of Akbar (Badauni), of a theologian (Shaikh Nurul Haq) and that of a known sycophant as well as courtier (Abul Fazl), it appears that the construction of the *Ibadatkhana* and the discussions taking place therein were not an extension of the type of religious debates that were being held or organized before the setting up of the new institution. It is the argument of this essay that the *Ibadatkhana* was an instrument to uphold the principle of reason and tolerance in the socio-religious context of the time.

At another level, Akbar had tried to include rational sciences like arithmetic, agriculture, household management, rules of governance, medicine and so on in the educational curriculum.<sup>9</sup> Throughout his reign there was a stress on reason (*‘aql*) which was to be given precedence over traditionalism (*taqlid*).<sup>10</sup> This stress on rationalism and reason was unique as was reflected in the *Ibadatkhana* discussions, too. Irfan Habib points out that among the two important attributes which Abul Fazl associated with a just ruler (*kar giya*), one was that such a sovereign ‘shall not seek popular acclaim through opposing reason (*‘aql*)’.<sup>11</sup> Probably, this

<sup>7</sup> Ibid., ff. 298(b)–99(a).

<sup>8</sup> Haq f. 157(b).

<sup>9</sup> Abul Fazl (1872: 201–02), Vol. I.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid. (1872: 229), Vol. II.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid. (1872: 3), Vol. I. See Habib (1998).

emphasis on rationalism was due to the advent of Fathullah Shirazi in the Mughal court. We have the testimony of Azad Bilgrami that it was Shah Fathullah Shirazi who introduced the works of Iranian rationalist thinkers like Muhaqqiq Dawwani, Mir Sadruddin, Mir Ghiyasuddin Mansur and Mirza Jan. Shirazi not only taught these works himself but, under his influence, they were introduced in the curriculum of the seminaries of higher education.<sup>12</sup>

Later, the order to erect the building of the *Ibadatkhana* was given in February–March 1575:

[A]t the time of his return from the beneficent journey to Ajmer, in the sacred month of *Zi-l-qa'da* in the year 982 A.H., corresponding with the 20th year of the Ilahi era, a noble order was issued that skilled architects, and expert builders should lay the foundation, by the side of the noble palace, of a building of the manner affected by the Sufis, and of a pure abode (*nashiman*) into which none but Saiyyads of high standing and learned men and Shaikhs should have access. The quick and active builders, in accordance with that world-obeyed order, completed the building consisting of four corridors within the appointed time.<sup>13</sup>

The building complex (*imarat*) was completed in 1576,<sup>14</sup> and discussions began to be held every Thursday evening which sometimes continued the whole night and up to the next day.<sup>15</sup> Nonetheless, they appear to have been discontinued for some time that year. They were resumed in 1578 in earnest.<sup>16</sup> It is believed that from this time, the discussions were no longer confined to Muslim theologians.<sup>17</sup>

Writing on the period prior to 1578, Arif Qandhari argues that:

He [Akbar] is the place of refuge for excellence who after finishing with the affairs of the world and matters of state on Friday evenings used to spend the night in the *ibadatkhana*, and having arranged a private assembly, used to sit in the *chahar suffa* (the four benches or platforms) that tells of the purity of his auspicious mind. It was adorned with lords, nobles, learned men from all quarters, the *ulama* and the pious of all persuasions, and he blessed and favoured each one of them with a gift from the supply of cash and other wares. Lectures on religious tenets of the *shari'a* and intellectual rules were ordered. In the subtleties of that situation most of the famous questions were raised for discussion. Accounts of narrations and tales, and signs of stories and traditions were written down on the tablet of his comprehensive mind and having become

<sup>12</sup> Bilgrami (1910: 236–37). For more see, Rezavi (2007).

<sup>13</sup> Ahmad, Vol. II, p. 311, see Badauni (1865: 198, 200).

<sup>14</sup> Badauni (1865: 200).

<sup>15</sup> Badauni (1865: 201), Ahmad, Vol. II, p. 481.

<sup>16</sup> Abul Fazl (1887: 252).

<sup>17</sup> Rizvi (1975: 125–28).

eternally familiar with the men of science and wisdom he used to greatly honor and revere the wise.

The time spent in learned debates and dealing with scholarly topics is like a person spending time in fending off sorrows. The time spent in consuming from the platter of munificence is like (time spent in) perfecting the *nafs* (self) of man. God is the only such being unparalleled that he does not change from changeless to changing.

Those associated with this spiritual assembly (*bazm-i ruhani*) [and its discussions] are like spiritual food and act like intoxicants which make the hidden topics apparent and the smells which uplift the spirits.<sup>18</sup>

From October 1578 onward, scholars of many faiths joined in the *Ibadatkhana* discussions. According to Abul Fazl, now the discussions were not confined to scholars of any one sect or creed. Mutual discussions further tempered the opinions of the proponents of each faith:

On 20 Mihr, Divine month [3 October 1578] and in that *ibadatkhana* (house of worship), the lamp of the privy chamber of detachment was kindled in the banqueting-hall of social life. The coin of the givers of wisdom in colleges and cells was brought to the test. The clear wine was separated from the lees, and good coin from the adulterated. The wide capacity and the toleration of the Shadow of God were unveiled. Sufi, philosopher, orator, jurist, Sunni, Shia, Brahman, Jati, Sevra [Jain monks], Charbak, Nazarene, Jew, Sabi (Sabian), Zoroastrian, and others enjoyed exquisite pleasure by beholding the calmness of the assembly, the sitting of the world-lord in the lofty pulpit (*mimbar*), and the adornment of the pleasant abode of impartiality. The treasures of secrets were opened out without fear of hostile seekers after battle. The just and truth-perceiving ones of each sect emerged from haughtiness and conceit, and began their search anew. They displayed profundity and meditation, and gathered eternal bliss on the divan of greatness.<sup>19</sup>

In the earlier recension of the *Akbarnama*, the aforementioned passage has been rendered differently. It mentioned the name of a Hindu scholar, Abdul Hayy Firangi, who is cited as having initiated a debate on the custom of *sati*. This was much appreciated by the emperor as evidence of the efficacy of such organized discussions.<sup>20</sup> Abul Fazl also mentioned the participation of Father Rudolf and religious scholars of other religions (*adyān*) in the *Ibadatkhana* discussions.<sup>21</sup>

<sup>18</sup> Qandhari (1962: 40–41).

<sup>19</sup> Abul Fazl (1887: 252–53), Vol. III.

<sup>20</sup> Abul Fazl, *Akbarnama*, f. 296(a).

<sup>21</sup> Ibid., ff. 298(a)–(b).

As a result of these debates not only had the Mughal court dissociated itself from giving active patronage to sections of the Islamic orthodoxy,<sup>22</sup> but the general atmosphere became more conducive to religious debate and dialogue. Badauni observed that in 1575 Raja Debi Chand suggested that 'Allah after all must have great respect for cows, or the cow would not have been mentioned in the first chapter of the Quran'.<sup>23</sup>

A conversation in the *Ibadatkhana* on 3 October 1578, reported in the earlier recension of the *Akbarnama*, reveals that Akbar had himself touched upon the principle of monogamy during the discussions: 'Under the principle of attachment to one another, which is the foundation of the arrangement of the universe it would be eminently preferable that one should not marry more than one wife in a lifetime.'<sup>24</sup> The reason given by Akbar as a justification for monogamy was based on the concept of mutual devotion between man and woman, an indication of his later tendency to stress the necessity of protecting women against men's unjust treatment of them.

The *Ibadatkhana* was also instrumental in facilitating discussions between the Muslim sects. The wide range of Shi'i-Sunni polemical debate (*manazira*) gathering led Badauni to lament that this had, 'emboldened the Shi'i *Ulama* and lowered the morale of the Sunni theologians'.<sup>25</sup> In the *Ibadatkhana* debates, the Shi'i were led by Mulla Muhammad Yazdi:

Attaching himself to the Emperor, he [Mulla Muhammad Yazdi] commenced openly to revile the *sahaba* (Companions of the Prophet), told queer stories about them, and tried hard to make him a Shi'i. But he was soon left behind by Bir Bar—that bastard! and Hakim Abul Fath, who successfully turned the Emperor from Islam, and led him to reject inspiration, prophethood, the miracles of the Prophet and of the saints, and even the whole law, so that he could no longer bear their company.<sup>26</sup>

Such religious debates became common beyond the court as well. In this phase, a large number of Sunni polemical works were also completed. For example, Abdullah Sultanpuri wrote *Minhaj al-din wa Mi'raj ul Muslimin*. The *Sawaiq al Muhriqa* of ibn Hajar al-Haisami and *al-Nawaqiz al-rawafiz* of Makhdum Sharifi were also in circulation. Qazi Nurullah's *Masa'ib un Nawasib* was the first Shi'i rejoinder written in India to the polemical debate initiated by the Sunni '*ulama*.

<sup>22</sup> Abul Fazl (1887: 491–500, 656–66), Vol. III.

<sup>23</sup> Badauni (1865: 250), Vol. II.

<sup>24</sup> Abul Fazl, *Akbarnama*, f. 296(a).

<sup>25</sup> Ibid. (1887: p. 308), Vol. II; Kaikhusrau Isfandiyar (1904: 12–15).

<sup>26</sup> Badauni (1865: 211), Vol. II.

The confident assertion of heterodox groups like the Shia during the reign of Akbar was probably the result of an atmosphere of open debates. Qazi Nurullah Shustari, a well known Shi'i scholar in Akbar's court, repeatedly asserted his position as a *mujtahid* and opposed the observance of *taqiyya* (dissimulation of sectarian identity) in India which he argued was hampering the growth and propagation of the Shi'i faith.<sup>27</sup> This position was further clarified in one of his letters to his fellow theologian and critic, Mir Yusuf 'Ali Astarabadi Akhbari of Agra:

Perhaps it is better for you to search the Shi'i houses in Agra and take away any books on the Shi'i faith and burn them ... I believe that as there is a just ruler in India, there is no justification for performing *taqiyya*. In any case it is not imperative for men like me who believe that death glorifies the faith of the martyr. The *shari'a* has indeed forbidden such persons to perform *taqiyya*. Only those who are not steadfast in their faith and do not care to strengthen it, should have recourse to it.<sup>28</sup>

Nurullah further refuted the concept of *taqiyya* in a number of letters sent to other critics and friends. For instance, in a letter written by him and sent to Mulla Qausi Shustari, the Qazi wrote a *qasida*: 'Blessed be the Emperor whose patronage in Hind has not made my faith dependent on *taqiyya*.'<sup>29</sup>

In a letter to Bahuddin A'muli, Nurullah Shustari reasoned:

I came to the conclusion that in India, *taqiyya* was a great calamity (*bala*): It would expel our children from the Imamiyya faith and make them embrace the false *Ash'ari* or *Maturidi* [i.e. Sunni] faiths. Reinforced by the kindness and bounty of the Sultan, I threw away the scarf of *taqiyya* from my shoulders and, taking with me an army of arguments, I plunged myself into *jihad* against the '*ulama* of this country. I fully understood that to argue with these Sunni ulama was equivalent to *jihad* which is the best medicine for the Day of Judgement.<sup>30</sup>

After 1581 we do not hear about the *Ibadatkhana* discussions. The religious discussions might have continued even after Fathpur Sikri was 'abandoned' and the capital was shifted back to Agra due to the continued reference to the term *Ibadatkhana* in the literature. Jahangir recorded in his memoirs that he went to Agra in his father's 47th regnal year, Akbar on account of his son's reported drinking bouts was quite unhappy with him. Jahangir stated that on his persistent denial of the charge, the emperor in order to test the veracity of the claims of innocence

<sup>27</sup> Qazi Nurullah Shustari (1882: 2–3); Khan (1979: 439), Vol. II. For a biographical sketch and philosophy of Nurullah Shustari, see Hasan (1984) and Rizvi (1986: Ch. V), Vol. I.

<sup>28</sup> Shustari (MS 12), Introduction, cf. Hasan (1984).

<sup>29</sup> *Bayaz*, f. 92(b).

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, ff. 95(a)–96(a).



by the prince, ordered him to be housed in the *Ibadatkhana* with a number of 'attendants to care and spy on him'. After about ten days when no occurrence of Jahangir's drinking bouts were reported, the emperor forgave him and allowed him to enter the palace.<sup>31</sup>

The attempt to identify the location of the *Ibadatkhana* at Fathpur Sikri was made by Edmund W. Smith during the last decades of the nineteenth century.<sup>32</sup> Such attempts still continue, and in the process, there are at least seven or eight locations or buildings which have at one time or the other been identified as the *Ibadatkhana* of Akbar. Amongst the buildings which have been identified as the *Ibadatkhana* one may include the square structure with the 'Lotus Pillar', popularly known as the '*diwan-i khās*',<sup>33</sup> the '*abdārkhāna*' or the 'Girls Madrasa' below the 'Panch Mahal'<sup>34</sup> and the quadrangle to the north-east of the '*diwān-i khās*' which regulates the entry into the *daulatkhana*.<sup>35</sup>

Another spot which has been identified as the *Ibadatkhana* lies to the east of the Badshahi Darwaza, in front of the north-eastern bastion of the Jāmi' Masjid. To its north is the *Haramsara* ('Jodhbai Palace' and 'Minor Haramsara'). This site was first identified as the place of the *Ibadatkhana* by Saeed Ahmad Marahrawi.<sup>36</sup> This identification was later taken up by Rizvi who further elaborated on it in 1972:

[I]t is now a massive rubble-platform, 19.50 metres square, covered with about 18 centimetres of lime mortar, visible at the edges, and appears to be piled high with a shapeless mass of debris; but on looking more closely one perceives the outlines of a second platform quite clearly. Heaped upon this is more rubbish, which might represent a third platform.<sup>37</sup>

Excavation in the same area by the Aligarh University team under the directorship of Prof. R.C. Gaur brought to light a structure comprising three platforms, one on top of the other, near the western wall of a dilapidated *qanatī* mosque with three extant arches and some unidentified cells. The similarity of this excavated complex with the image in a miniature painting of *Akbarnama* housed at Chester Beatty<sup>38</sup> convinced the excavators about the site being the *Ibadatkhana*. Since 1984, this building has generally been projected, and accepted (with some exceptions), as the structure of the *Ibadatkhana*.

<sup>31</sup> Khan (1870: 505), Vol. II.

<sup>32</sup> Smith (1894–99: 24), Vol. I.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid. (1894: 22), Vol. I. See also Smith (1917: 720–24).

<sup>34</sup> Nath (1976).

<sup>35</sup> See Sharma (2003: 35).

<sup>36</sup> Muhammad Saeed Ahmad Marahrawi (1906).

<sup>37</sup> Rizvi (1972: 37); see also Rizvi and Flynn (1975: 43–44).

<sup>38</sup> Abul Fazl, *Akbarnama*, f. 263 (b).

The painting contains a line of the text, which proves that the artist is depicting the *Ibadatkhana*:

... was illuminating, Padre Rudolf, one of the scholars of the Christians (*az danishwaran-i Nasari*) who has elements of uniqueness in understanding and nature, was speaking in that assemblage of enlightenment.

These words were taken from the text of the *Akbarnama* with the preceding part of the sentence being: 'One night the assembly of the *Ibadatkhana* ...'<sup>39</sup>

The miniature depicts the emperor seated before a chamber fronted with a pillared veranda. Four arches above which a white dome is visible are placed in the background. Facing the emperor on the carpet-covered platform are seated a number of scholars, including the two Jesuit priests. Although there are some visual affinities between the excavated site and the image in the miniature, the site does not tally with the information which we get from Abul Fazl, Badauni or Nizamuddin Ahmad.

According to Badauni, the building of the *Ibadatkhana* consisted 'of four *aiwans*, near the new palace in Fathpur'.<sup>40</sup> He pointed out in another context:

and when also news arrived from Badakhshan of the coming of Mirza Sulaiman, who was a prince of Sufi tendencies, and had become a *Sahib-i-hal*, and a Murid: for these urgent reasons he had the very cell of Shaikh Abdullah Niyazi Sarhindi (who had formerly been a disciple of Shaikh Islam Chishti, but had afterwards joined the circle of Mahdawis) repaired, and built a spacious *aiwan* on all four sides of it. He also finished the construction of the '*imārat-i hauz-i Anūptalāo*. He named that cell the *Ibadat-khanah*, which became by degrees *Iyadat-khanah*.<sup>41</sup>

The four *aiwans* or porticos are mentioned by Abul Fazl as well:

There were always four noble sections in that spiritual and temporal assemblage. In the eastern chamber of worship (*Ibadat-kada*) were the great leaders and high officers who were conspicuous in the courts of society, for enlightenment. In the southern compartment the keen-sighted investigators, both those who gathered the light of day (i.e., the Illuminati) and those who chose the repose of the night-halls of contemplation, sate [*sic*] in the school of instruction. In the western compartment those of lofty lineage practised auspicious arts. In the northern compartment were the Sufis of clear heart who were absorbed

<sup>39</sup> Abul Fazl (1887: 254), Vol. III.

<sup>40</sup> Badauni (1865: 198), Vol. II.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid. (1865: 201), Vol. II. We have already cited the statement of Nizamuddin bearing relevance to this point.

in beatific visions. A few of felicitous and wide comprehensiveness, which they had attained to by the bliss of H.M.'s holy instructions—lighted the torch of knowledge in all four compartments. Lofty points and subtle words passed from the holy lips, and physical and Divine truths trickled from that soothsayer of the court of variety, so that the leaders of the arena of manifestation, and the swift coursers on the mountains of contemplation burned with shame.<sup>42</sup>

From these references it is reasonably clear that the building of *Ibadatkhana*:

1. consisted of at least four *aiwans* (porticos/verandah/open galleries);
2. was situated close to the palace and
3. it was very near if not within the '*imārat-i hauz-i anūptalāo*'.

It is also clear from these references that 'the building of the *Ibadatkhana*' was large enough to hold a great assemblage of people who would gather for the discussions. It would thus be erroneous to identify the triple-platforms excavated by Gaur as the structure and building of the *Ibadatkhana*. A closer look at the Chester-Beatty *Akbarnama* miniature also reveals the fallacy of any such affiliations: it shows people sitting on a flat carpet surrounding the elevated seat of the emperor. There is no triple-platformed structure depicted in the miniature.

Then where is the *Ibadatkhana* located?

The area of the *daulatkhāna-i anūptalāo* was named after a *hauz* (tank) with a structure of the same name constructed in this locale.<sup>43</sup> Badauni mentioned the existence of a structure, which he referred to as the *hujra-i anūptalao* (the room of the Anuptalao), where the emperor occasionally held religious discussions.<sup>44</sup> We have quoted Badauni to the effect that the *Ibadatkhana* was situated close to the '*imārat-i hauz-i Anūptalāo*'.<sup>45</sup> If we believe Badauni, the religious discussions would sometimes be held 'at the *hauz* known as *anuptalao*': 'One night at the tank known as *Anup Talao*, he set forth the whole case, and asked certain opportunistic *muftis* (jurists) and stirrers-up of strife for a decision on the question.'<sup>46</sup>

Fr. Monserrate in one of his letters to the Provincial, Fr. Rue Vicente, speaks explicitly about this place when he writes:

[On] Saturday, the day set aside for hearing the things of God, all three of us [Frs. Acquaviva, Henrique and Monserrate] went to the palace 'Darigtiana'

<sup>42</sup> Abul Fazl (1887: 112–13), Vol. III. See also Qandhari (1962: 40–41).

<sup>43</sup> Badauni (1865: 201), Vol. II; Qandhari (1962: 151); Abul Fazl (1887: 246), Vol. III. It is interesting to note that Fr. Monserrate (1980: 28) and Jahangir (1863–64: 260) mention Kapurtalao instead of Anuptalao. See *Infra*.

<sup>44</sup> Badauni (1865: 208), Vol. II; see also Fr. Monserrate (1980: 28).

<sup>45</sup> See *supra* Badauni (1865: 201), Vol. II.

<sup>46</sup> Badauni (1865: 81), Vol. III.

(*daulatkhāna*), and when it was time, the king having himself six of his mullahs of the most knowledgeable, he sent for us and we went up to a *verandah* where he is wont to speak at other times ...<sup>47</sup>

... he [Akbar] was listening out of courtesy, for while not a point escaped him and he asked something in order to understand better what was being read, he was nodding, making believe that he was sleeping, and on the other hand he cast his very bright eyes all about the *room* taking stock of the persons with the dissimulation of a very prudent and wise man.<sup>48</sup>

These statements suggest that the discussion could be held at another place which bore the name *hujra-i anūptalāo*, situated within the *daulatkhana*. Is this then a reference to the so-called 'Turkish Sultana's Palace' situated near the *Anuptalao*? If so, then the cloistered veranda, apart from being used to seat the people summoned for interview by the emperor,<sup>49</sup> also separated the area of the *daulatkhāna-i anūptalāo* from the *daulatkhāna-i khās*.<sup>50</sup>

A look at the 'Turkish Sultana's Palace' shows that it could hardly seat the number of people alluded to by Monserrate. Were it then the building and the 'chamber' situated to the south of the *khwabgah* which is now known as the *daftarkhana*?

Excavations by Gaur in the area of the so-called *daftarkhana* revealed that the present entrances to it were once not there and the wall continued throughout, cordoning off the area. The cloisters around the *khwabgah* also bear marks of renovation. It appears that once the area of the *daftarkhana* also had an entry gate straight from the *khwabgah/khilwatkadah* structure.

This contention is further supported by the evidence provided by Edmund W. Smith who during his surveys encountered the remains of a circular capital:

...the south of the tank abutting on the gangway leading to the large Turkish baths by the Record Chamber; for here we found, whilst excavating, the remains of many specimens of sculptured stone, which must have belonged to an important building. Amongst them were a number of pieces of a circular capital which must have vied in splendour with that within the *Diwan-i Khas*.<sup>51</sup>

A survey of this structure reveals a chamber constructed below it, which can be accessed from the grounds below. Was it then the cell of Shaikh Abdullah Niyazi Sarhindi over which the structure of the *Ibadatkhana* is said to have been built?

<sup>47</sup> Fr. Monserrate (1980: 72).

<sup>48</sup> Ibid., p. 74.

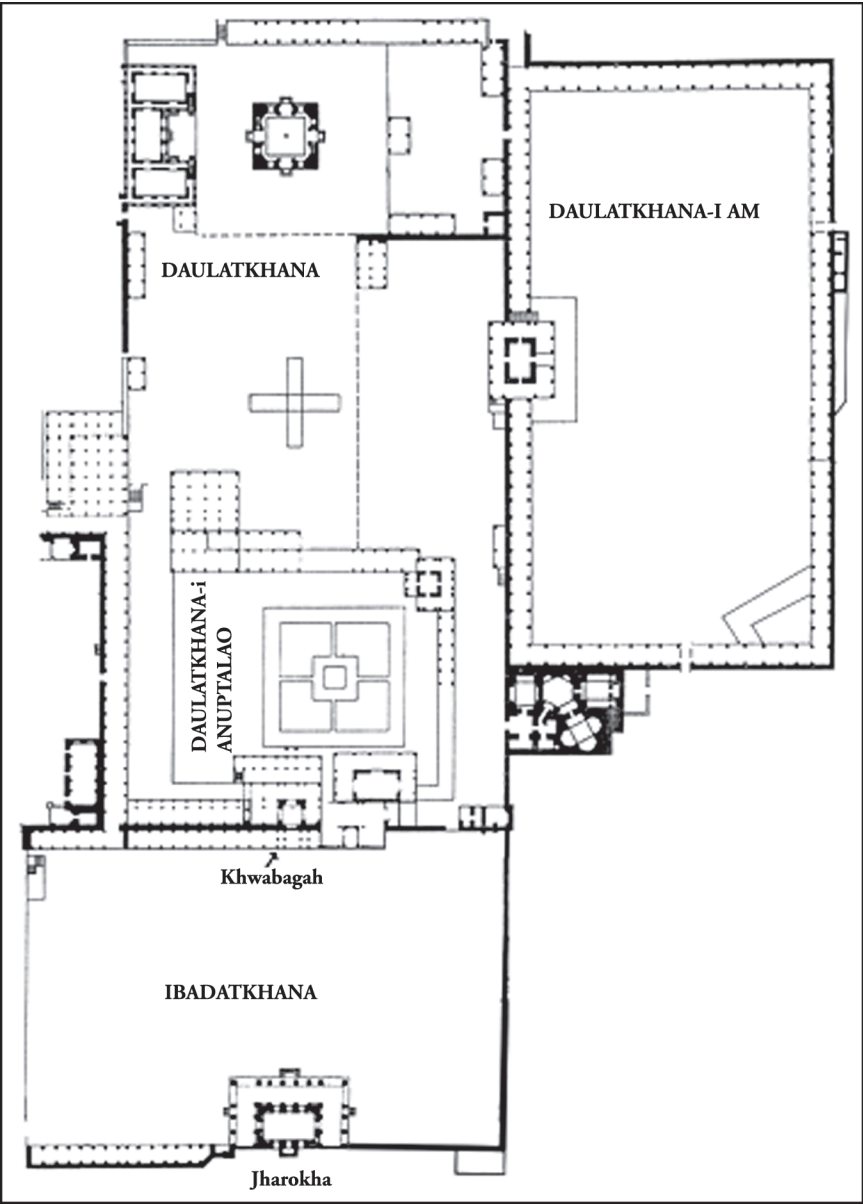
<sup>49</sup> Ibid., p. 83.

<sup>50</sup> From the way the cloisters to the west of the *hujra* (running from the east to the west) join this structure, it appears that the screening was done after the *hujra-i anuptalao* had been fully constructed.

<sup>51</sup> Smith (1894: 24), Vol. I.

This identification (See Map 1) corroborates the information of Abul Fazl, Arif Qandhari, Abdul Qadir Badauni, Nizamuddin Ahmad and others cited earlier.

Map 1  
Ibadatkhana



This so-called ‘*daftarkhana*’, which I identify as the *Ibadatkhana*, is situated next to and immediately north of, the *daulatkhana*, and the *khwabgah* of the emperor. It was also conveniently placed for such guests as Mirza Sulaiman, whose arrival at Fathpur had necessitated its construction,<sup>52</sup> and who had been lodged in a structure near the *Hathipol*. To the west is the Jami’ Masjid and in the east the waterworks and service areas. In its north is the steep fall of the ridge below which is situated the town of Fathpur. An elaborate *jharokha* opens from the middle of the northern wall of the main chamber, another *jharokha* opens from the *khwabgah* into the open ground of this structure: a reminder perhaps of Akbar’s nightly debates with the hermit Debi mentioned by Badauni.<sup>53</sup>

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